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Mary Wollstonecraft on Reason, Marriage, Family Life, and the Development of Virtue in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Paul E. Kerry*

Gracious Creator of the whole human race! hast thou created such a being as woman, who can trace thy wisdom in thy works, and feel that thou alone are by thy nature exalted above her,—for no better purpose?—Can she believe that she was only made to submit to man, her equal, a being, who, like her, was sent into the world to acquire virtue?—Can she consent to be occupied merely to please him; merely to adorn the earth, when her soul is capable of rising to thee?—And can she rest supinely dependent on man for reason, when she ought to mount with him the arduous steeps of knowledge?¹

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published in 1792 after she had critiqued Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). She insisted on natural rights whilst Burke considered such talk metaphysical claptrap. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*'s concern for the status of women in the wake of the French Revolution was not singular—Olympia de Gouges and others critiqued the 1789 French Assembly's Declaration of the Rights of Man in a way that would be echoed later by the watershed moment in nineteenth-century women's rights: the Seneca Fall's Convention in 1848, organized by Quaker women, such as Lucretia Mott, and a non-Quaker, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They deployed the language of the Declaration of Independence, such as "all men are created equal"

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1. MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, *A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN* 67 (Carol H. Poston ed., Norton 1988) (1792) [hereinafter VRW]. I express thanks to Nicola Trott (Balliol College, Oxford) with whom I discussed my research at an early point, and Lina Jemili, University of California, Berkeley, for much later conversations when she was a student in my course on the Pembroke-King's Programme, Cambridge. Megan Kearney, Keble College, Oxford, and Rachel Cope, Brigham Young University, read and commented on drafts of this paper for which I am grateful. I presented a version of this paper in the Rothermere American Institute's Constitutional Thought and History research seminar at the University of Oxford and appreciated in particular Linda Kirk's comments.

to highlight the ironies of the political status of women.²

There are other ends that Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has served, and the following will touch on a few of these before putting forward the purpose of the analysis here. When the treatise was first published, it received notice from some as a typical plea for an educational program for women. Now, Wollstonecraft continues to be cited as an early proponent of opening up all levels and subjects of education for women, views she shared with one of the leading woman of her time, the historian Catherine Macaulay, whom she admired and acknowledged.³

Aside from Wollstonecraft's well-known call for reform in chapter XII of her treatise, "On National Education,"⁴ there are other calls for reform suggested implicitly in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, such as labor reform. Women must "become free by being enabled to earn their own subsistence, independent of men."⁵ She specifically states that women can do whatever a man can do professionally (making a small allowance for work that might require great physical strength), including practicing as physicians, regulating a farm, managing a shop, anything in which they could be "supported by their own industry."⁶ These open calls for reform have become the way that her treatise has been defined over time.

Wollstonecraft's ideas have also been situated in the light of Republican motherhood.⁷ Her text contains a direct appeal to men to help emancipate women so that they may support civil society as better educated and informed women, which would also improve their familial relationships: "Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better

2. SOPHIE MOUSSET, *WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: A BIOGRAPHY OF OLYMPE DE GOUGES* (2014); SALLY McMILLEN, *SENECA FALLS AND THE ORIGINS OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT* (2009).

3. "The very word respect brings Mrs. Macaulay to my remembrance. The woman of the greatest abilities, undoubtedly, that this country has ever produced." VRW, *supra* note 1, at 105.

4. *Id.* at 157–78.

5. *Id.* at 165.

6. *Id.* at 149.

7. See LINDA KERBER, *WOMEN OF THE REPUBLIC: INTELLECT AND IDEOLOGY IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA* (1980). Barbara Taylor contends that the term "republican motherhood" does not play a "key role" in Wollstonecraft's ideas. BARBARA TAYLOR, *MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION* 223 (2004) [hereinafter TAYLOR, *THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION*].

citizens.”⁸ Although Wollstonecraft offered no political program, she envisioned women participating directly in formal political institutions “instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government.”⁹

Her famous statement near the conclusion of her book, that a “REVOLUTION in female manners”¹⁰ was needed, is of course cited by scholars, perhaps not least because she used ALL CAPS to draw attention to it, although she uses the phrase earlier.¹¹ What she means by this, at least in part (for much of the argument of her book is directed at explaining this), is that a gendered view of virtue and the concomitant male response, such as excessive gallantry, causes women to stunt their growth in some areas and pervert their development in others. For example, “women are systematically degraded by receiving the trivial attentions, which men think it manly to pay to the sex, when, in fact, they are insultingly supporting their own superiority.”¹² And the “trivial cares” and “false refinement,” anxiety over “secondary things” and the “love of pleasure” absorb the energy and take up the time of women and distract them from “duties” that would form character and develop virtue.¹³ Society thus “degrades them” by making them into “mere dolls.”¹⁴ Tomaselli has argued that “what Wollstonecraft sought was a society in which all men as well as women could be freed from all that the need to be admired entails.”¹⁵

The purpose here is not to dispute these aspects of the reception history of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,¹⁶ but rather to intervene in a more recent critical debate. Wollstonecraft’s views on marriage, motherhood, and domesticity have sometimes been seen as an embarrassment in some of the feminist reception of the history of her treatise. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is accused of being imbued by “a paradoxical feminist misogyny”¹⁷ or offering up a “puritan

8. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 150.

9. *Id.* at 147. Wollstonecraft notes that her treatise is aimed at the middle class.

10. *Id.* at 192.

11. *Id.* at 45.

12. *Id.* at 57.

13. *Id.* at 60.

14. *Id.* at 145.

15. Sylvana Tomaselli, *Remembering Mary Wollstonecraft on the Bicentenary of the Publication of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT 39–44 (Jane Moore ed., Ashgate 2012).

16. This article will focus only on Wollstonecraft’s most well-known contribution to political philosophy, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and not her other writings or interpret the treatise from her biography.

17. Vivien Jones, *Advice and Enlightenment: Mary Wollstonecraft and Sex Education*, in

sexual ethic with such passionate conviction that self-denial seems a libidized activity.”¹⁸ Wollstonecraft’s writing with its emphasis on chastity and modesty is pardoned for its apparent naivety as a work from her “virginal period”¹⁹ when she had no experience of “erotic love.”²⁰ Perhaps at the very least feminist theorists have found certain elements of Wollstonecraft’s treatise perplexing.

The aim of the argument here is to show how *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* presents a view of the equal dignity and intellectual capacity of the sexes embedded in the proposition that males and females are beholden to the same standard of virtue and chastity. Wollstonecraft further argues that both women and men have the same obligation to develop virtue by living lives that are ordered to duties by reason. Reason guides the passions and is exercised through the use of moral agency. Although her treatise calls for certain kinds of female independence, there are also spheres of interdependence and complementarity on which she insists in marriage, childrearing, and family life, but also in the development of virtue. Indeed, in the quest to develop virtue, men and women need each other: “The two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other. This I believe to be an indisputable truth, extending it to every virtue.”²¹ Although Wollstonecraft accords religion a central teaching role as well, it is critical to the philosophical underpinnings of her treatise that human reason (God given, in her view) can derive the principles she puts forward and as such her arguments resonate with those made by natural law advocates.²² Without this set of arguments, Wollstonecraft’s compelling philosophical insights are only partially understood if not largely missed, reduced as they are to calls for specific kinds of action rather than understood as reasoned contributions to political thought.²³ A

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT 179–94 (Jane Moore ed., 2012)(quoting Susan Gubar).

18. Cora Kaplan, *Wild Nights. Pleasures/Sexuality/Feminism in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT* 338 (Jane Moore ed., 2012) [hereinafter Kaplan, *Wild Nights*].

19. TAYLOR, *THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION*, *supra* note 7, at 124 (quoting Ellen Moers).

20. *Id.* at 121.

21. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 140.

22. Religion furnishes further, if not higher motivations and standards, for example: “A Christian still has nobler motives to incite her to preserve her chastity and acquire modesty, for her body has been called the Temple of the living God; of that God who requires more than modesty of mien. His eye searcheth the heart.” *Id.* at 130.

23. One group of scholars called for Wollstonecraft’s place in political philosophy to be made more central. See FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (Maria J. Falco ed., 1997). Wollstonecraft’s inclusion in the *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* series and the Liberty Fund’s *Online Library of Liberty* are important steps in placing her work in the context of political thought.

part of the work here must include restoring Wollstonecraft's argument through her own words by close reading.

This begs an important question: How could Wollstonecraft's many words on key elements of complementarity between man and woman in marriage, childrearing, family life, and the development of virtue and the role of reason go undetected or be neglected? Some of Wollstonecraft's ideas are explained away strategically by suggesting that she had to work within the accepted idioms of her time to revolutionize from within the prevalent discourse. On this view, Wollstonecraft is seen to pose her arguments "within a framework that was minimally acceptable to popular prejudices."²⁴ The implication is that she cloaked her real arguments inside of language and tropes that would allow other, less acceptable ideas of the time, to be granted passage into the public discourse. Yet, her ideas, those presented here, are strongly present, in some cases tirelessly omnipresent, in her treatise. She holds these up not as the husk in which to hide the real kernel of her meaning, but as essential to her argument—they are the root of her philosophical thinking. It is strangely myopic to classify her thinking on chastity, marriage, the family, and the complementarity of the sexes as mere window dressing because her views are not radical nor break decisively with traditional thinking.

Another answer to the question is that Wollstonecraft's insights are often placed onto a procrustean bed of feminist theory. Wollstonecraft's place in intellectual history has changed along with the political fortunes of the women's movement. Sometimes it appears as if *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is caught in an interpretative struggle over the meaning of feminism, rather than allowing the treatise to challenge and broaden what feminism means. It is tempting to confer on this text a status as a forerunner of modern feminism, but, depending on what a critic defines this to be, such a status can lead to distortions in understanding the text. The risk of "vile anachronism"²⁵ is always present when studying any thinker from an ideological or theoretical perspective. Finely textured ideas of past thinkers

24. Kaplan, *Wild Nights*, *supra* note 18, at 349.

25. Regina James, *Mary, Mary Quite Contrary, Or, Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft Compared*, in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT 159 (Jane Moore ed., 2012) ("To speak of eighteenth-century feminism is to commit a vile anachronism, for there was no movement, no concerned demand for change in the political or economic sphere."). See also Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism*, in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT 358–79 (Jane Moore ed., 2012). Taylor cites Julie Kristeva's "periodisation of the development of nineteenth and twentieth-century Western feminist politics into three phases" that "co-exist as ideological moments across the entire history of feminist thought." *Id.* at 360–61.

run the risk of becoming flattened to fit an agenda. This apprehension is conveyed in the words of one critic: "One can see how the moral analysis and the social description in *A Vindication* could be appropriated for a more conservative social theory, which . . . would confine [women] to a desexualized domestic sphere as wives and mothers."²⁶ Certainly the multivalent meanings in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* might disturb a tidy reading that would grant it some kind of prototypical status or bind it to one end of a political spectrum. The high aim of scholarship, of course, is to attempt to understand Wollstonecraft's treatise without pressing it tendentiously into one's particular agenda, theoretical, political, or otherwise. Yet, warning about conservative appropriation can easily chill legitimate efforts to rehabilitate a key text in ways that might threaten the dominant feminist paradigms that have confined *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to a narrower reading than is borne out by the evidence.²⁷ Rather than pre-emptively silencing or ignoring potentially "contradictory implications"²⁸ it could be that the most interesting insights are to be found in exploring the tensions rather than in pulling or pushing the text in one ideological direction or another.

Barbara Taylor's recent research presents a fresh case study of just such a reconsideration of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft is differentiated from devout Christian women, such as Mary Astell or her contemporary Hannah More, who would see reform through a Christian lens to be achieved through Christian means. Certainly Wollstonecraft argues philosophically. Yet, Taylor recognizes that none of this means that Wollstonecraft is not also a religious thinker and has argued provocatively: "It was thanks to God, in other words, that Mary Wollstonecraft became a feminist."²⁹ To lay out the contour of Professor Taylor's argument her reasoning is quoted at length:

Admirers of Mary Wollstonecraft are often reluctant to see her as a religious thinker. This should not surprise us. Appeals to God and virtue of the kind that dominate the *Rights of Woman* are pretty much 'a dead letter' to feminists now, one critic remarks; and if by dead letter is meant a failed communication, then it is certainly true

26. Kaplan, *Wild Nights*, *supra* note 18, at 346.

27. Gary Kelly, *Mary Wollstonecraft: Texts and Contexts*, in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT 35–37 (Jane Moore ed., 2012) ("Mary Wollstonecraft . . . had a powerful integrating mind which strove constantly for unity in the moral world of man, and which constantly renewed its vision of that unity with new knowledge, new experience, and new imaginative insight.").

28. Kaplan, *Wild Nights*, *supra* note 18, at 349.

29. TAYLOR, *THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION*, *supra* note 7, at 94.

that of all aspects of Wollstonecraft's thought it is her religious faith that has failed to speak to modern interpreters. Most studies do no more than gesture toward it, and then usually dismiss it as ideological baggage foisted on her by her times, with no positive implications for her views on women. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* is generally located in a tradition of Enlightenment humanism that is assumed to have been at least indifferent to religion, if not actively hostile to it.

So it is startling, on looking closely at the *Rights of Woman*, to find that it contains at least fifty discussions of religious themes, ranging from brief statements on one or other doctrinal point to extended analyses of women's place within a divinely ordered moral universe. Nor are these discussions in any sense peripheral to the main message of the text. If Wollstonecraft's faith becomes a dead letter to us, then so does much of her feminism, so closely are they harnessed together. The famous call for a 'revolution of female manners' in the *Rights of Woman* is first and foremost a summons to women to establish a right relationship with their Maker.³⁰

Dismissing religion and Mary Wollstonecraft's personal God as a significant source of her thinking not only misconstrues her thinking, but devalues what Taylor sees as Wollstonecraft's feminism. Similarly, there is thick evidence within the argument put forward here that shows that Wollstonecraft's thinking resists being placed in convenient categories. Far more than seeing those elements of her thinking which disturb certain feminist theoretical readings as naïve or as mere plumage, these are at the heart of her argument and contest an easy mapping of her book onto ideological debates.

I. REASON'S ROLE: ORDERING RIGHTS TO DUTIES AND DIRECTING PASSIONS

An important foundation to understanding Wollstonecraft's way of thinking is to analyze the role of reason in directing the passions and ordering rights to duties. Wollstonecraft calls the right of acting "according to the direction of his own reason" a fundamental human right, even "the birth-right of man."³¹ Sylvana Tomaselli points out that Wollstonecraft always links rights to duties and responsibilities,³²

30. *Id.* at 93–94.

31. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 154. The Kantian resonances here are strong.

32. MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT, *A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF MEN AND A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN* ix–xxix (Sylvana Tomaselli ed., 1995). Tomaselli's introduction is a concise analysis and summary of the political theoretical implications of Woll-

a position that supports structured liberty and ordered freedom as the rights one has are ordered to obligations. Wollstonecraft insists that “reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly.”³³ Women should strive after a “well-regulated mind” that produces “moral loveliness” and “harmonious propriety.”³⁴ Her proposition is that the use of reason authenticates an action or fulfillment of a duty. The use of reason touches on all duties. If these are not supported by a woman’s reason they are deeply inauthentic and cause not only hypocrisy, but also prevent the development of moral character. Wollstonecraft states:

Moralists have unanimously agreed that unless virtue be nursed by liberty, it will never attain due strength—and what they say of man I extend to mankind, insisting that in all cases morals must be fixed on immutable principles; and, that the being who cannot be termed rational or virtuous, who obeys any authority, but that of reason.³⁵

Notice that Wollstonecraft universalizes the principle that reason undergirds virtue: it is the same for men and women.

Simon Swift notes that Wollstonecraft scholarship must wrestle with what appears to be a strong Enlightenment emphasis on reason: “[T]o read Wollstonecraft’s political philosophy as analogous to Kantian critique . . . leave[s] themselves [and Swift cites major Wollstonecraft scholars Mary Poovey and Janet Todd] open to the accusation that . . . she [Wollstonecraft] is therefore complicit with the type of gender stereotyping that has often been taken to characterize Kant’s concept of civil society.”³⁶ There is a strong logic to Wollstonecraft’s appeal to reason to protect the dignity and equality of women for “if [women are] really capable of acting like rational creatures, let them not be treated like slaves,” yet reason does not confer the dignity or equality, for woman will attain an equal status and a “conscious dignity by feeling themselves only dependent on God.”³⁷ Although there are certainly Enlightenment strains in Wollstonecraft’s unwavering emphasis on reason, she does not derive it merely from Enlightenment thought, but her argument suggests that her thinking is also informed by a view of reason that predates the

stonecraft’s treatise.

33. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 64.

34. *Id.* at 149.

35. *Id.* at 191.

36. Simon Swift, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the ‘Reserve of Reason,’ in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT* 92 (Jane Moore ed., 2012).

37. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 36.

Enlightenment and does not rely on revealed religion.

Another position in the secondary scholarship is that for Wollstonecraft, ordered freedom followed a divine pattern. Barbara Taylor makes this connection: “Wollstonecraft’s leading ambition for women was that they should attain virtue, and it was to this end that she sought their liberation” and “[t]his freedom, as she imagined it, was not the ability to do what one pleased—which she would have called licence—but to act rightly, according to God’s design.”³⁸ Unlike those philosophes that attempted to dispense with God, Wollstonecraft recognized that although no man or woman had a right to force someone against his or her “dignity of a rational will,” that will was nevertheless still responsible “to God” or in her words “only bows to God.”³⁹ Taylor sees this in a straightforward way: “It is from God, not convention, that standards or human virtue derive, just as it is His path to universal happiness down which humanity must inexorably travel.”⁴⁰ Says Wollstonecraft: “Thanks to that Being who . . . gave me sufficient strength of mind to dare to exert my own reason, till, becoming dependent only on him for the support of my virtue, I view, with indignation, the mistaken notions that enslave my sex.”⁴¹ Her vision of reason’s role in the development of virtue influenced her understanding of religion: “Rational religion, on the contrary, is a submission to the will of a being so perfectly wise, that all he wills must be directed by the proper motive—must be reasonable.”⁴²

There is space between the Enlightenment view and the religious one that is productive in analyzing Wollstonecraft’s understanding of reason’s role. Wollstonecraft’s thinking appears in some ways strikingly similar to a natural law style of argument⁴³ when she asserts that God’s “design” in the human condition between good and evil is to seek to produce “rational creatures” that are meant to “rise in excel-

38. TAYLOR, *THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION*, *supra* note 7, at 12.

39. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 36.

40. TAYLOR, *THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION*, *supra* note 7, at 124.

41. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 36–37.

42. *Id.* at 183.

43. There are a variety of Natural Law interpretations. See, e.g. J. BUDZISZEWSKI, *WHAT WE CAN’T NOT KNOW: A GUIDE* (Ignatius Press 2011) (2003); *NATURAL LAW THEORY: CONTEMPORARY ESSAYS* (Robert P. George ed., Oxford Univ. Press 1994); KNUD HAAKONSSON, *NATURAL LAW AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY: FROM GROTIUS TO THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT* (1996); JACQUES MARITAIN, *NATURAL LAW: REFLECTIONS ON THEORY & PRACTICE* (2001); *THE NATURAL LAW READER* (Jacqueline A. Laing & Russell Wilcox eds., 2013); JEAN PORTER, *NATURE AS REASON: A THOMISTIC THEORY OF THE NATURAL LAW* (2005); HEINRICH A. ROMMEN, *THE NATURAL LAW: A STUDY IN LEGAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY* (Thomas R. Hanley trans., Liberty Fund 1998) (1936).

lence by the exercise of powers implanted for that purpose.”⁴⁴ Later she calls this power to reason, “an emanation of divinity, the tie that connects the creature with the Creator” the sign of which is that the soul is “stamped with the heavenly image.”⁴⁵ Her very language, “implanted,”⁴⁶ “stamped,”⁴⁷ “impressed . . . on my soul”⁴⁸ resonates with the biblical language in St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans (“written in their hearts”) with its formulation of what has been held to be an ancient articulation of natural law:

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;⁴⁹

Aquinas stated: “The natural law is promulgated precisely by the fact that God has inserted it into the minds of men in such a way that they are able to know it naturally.”⁵⁰ The philosopher Ralph McInerny’s definition accords with the biblical verses: “Natural law—the theory—maintains that there is a common fund of knowledge, truths we can assume that everyone—anyone—already knows.”⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas also “described the function of the natural law as ‘the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and evil.’”⁵² This is surprisingly similar to Wollstonecraft’s own definition: “Reason is . . . the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth.”⁵³

There are further Thomistic reverberations in Wollstonecraft’s thought, for it is the right relationship with one’s Creator and our acting according to nature that gives one the ability to discern proper

44. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 14.

45. *Id.* at 53.

46. *Id.* at 14.

47. *Id.* at 53.

48. *Id.* at 36.

49. *Romans* 2:14–15. See ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *POLITICAL WRITINGS* 85 (R. W. Dyson ed., 2002).

50. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *supra* note 49, at 83.

51. Ralph McInerny, *Are There Moral Truths that Everyone Knows?*, in *COMMON TRUTHS: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATURAL LAW* 1 (Edward B. McLean ed., 2004).

52. Charles Rice, *Natural Law in the Twenty-First Century*, in *COMMON TRUTHS: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATURAL LAW* 306 (Edward B. McLean ed., 2004) (quoting ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*, I–II 91.1).

53. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 53.

acts and ends. Her thinking along these lines will be described more fully below, but here is the formulation in the *Summa Theologica*:

It is manifest that all things participate to some degree in the eternal law, insofar, that is to say, as they have from its impression inclinations to their own acts and ends. Among the others, however, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, insofar as it is itself made a participant in providence, being provident for itself and others. Hence there is in it a participation in the eternal reason, through which it has a natural inclination towards a due act and end. And such participation in the eternal law by the rational creature is called the natural law.⁵⁴

Alasdair MacIntyre puts it this way: “[O]ur human nature is such that, as rational beings, we cannot but recognize that obedience to some particular set of precepts is required, if we are to achieve our good or goods.”⁵⁵ This harmonizes smoothly with Wollstonecraft’s view: “[T]o submit to reason is to submit to the nature of things, and to that of God, who formed them so, to promote our real interest.”⁵⁶ And one question that must be explored is what Wollstonecraft holds as the “nature of things” in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Robert P. George maintains that natural law is “most fundamentally, a set of principles directing human choice and action toward intelligible purposes, i.e., basic human goods that, as intrinsic aspects of human well-being and fulfillment, constitute reasons for action whose intelligibility as reasons does not depend on any more fundamental reasons”⁵⁷ This is central to understanding that although Wollstonecraft’s work is sometimes placed in the light of campaigning for specific improvements, such as in education, the deeper philosophical claim of her treatise is more far-reaching: the intelligible goods that she puts forward. These include virtue, chastity, marriage, childbearing, childrearing, and friendship (very important to Wollstonecraft), all of which are basic human goods that do not have to be justified, nor instrumentalized, as they are ends in themselves. “Virtue, like every thing valuable, must be loved for herself alone; or she will not take up her abode with us. She will not impart that peace,

54. JEAN PORTER, NATURE AS REASON 48 (quoting SUMMA ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, I-II 91.2).

55. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity*, in COMMON TRUTHS: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATURAL LAW 94 (Edward B. McLean ed., 2004).

56. VRW at 155.

57. Robert P. George, *Natural Law and Positive Law*, in COMMON TRUTHS: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON NATURAL LAW 151 (Edward B. McLean ed., 2004).

‘which passeth understanding.’”⁵⁸ And elsewhere she is as clear: “[V]irtue must be loved as in itself sublime and excellent, and not for the advantages it procures or the evil it averts”⁵⁹ Similarly, the dignity of woman is not granted, conferred or bestowed, it is inherent in woman as a reasoning being. Thus, for Wollstonecraft it is nothing short of tyranny “to subjugate a rational being to the mere will of another, after he is of age to answer to society for his own conduct, [and] is a most cruel and undue stretch of power”⁶⁰

Wollstonecraft sees human happiness as nesting in the free exercise of moral agency, but that agency is constituted by one’s ability to exercise reason. She powerfully sets forth here: “[T]he perfection of our nature and capability of happiness, must be estimated by degree of reason, virtue, and knowledge, that distinguish the individual, and direct the laws which bind society: and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flow”⁶¹

Reason has a crucial role to play in fostering virtue and eschewing vice. Reason, to use Wollstonecraft’s terms, checks and governs our appetites and passions, an obligation for both women and men, so that they may choose intelligible, intrinsic goods and pursue them: “Women as well as men ought to have the common appetites and passions of their nature, they are only brutal when unchecked by reason: but the obligation to check them is the duty of mankind, not a sexual duty.”⁶² This is a reversal of David Hume’s pronouncement: “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”⁶³ In interpreting this passage, George observes that on this account:

“[t]here is merely a ‘self.’ And the self is constituted not by powers of rationality that enable us to know what is humanly good and morally right and direct our desires toward it; rather, it is constituted by our desires themselves. Reason’s role in our conduct can be nothing more than instrumental. It is not, and cannot be, the mas-

58. VRW at 101.

59. *Id.* at 115.

60. *Id.* at 153.

61. *Id.* at 12. Note the Thomistic reverberation: “[L]aw . . . is nothing but a certain ordinance of reason for the common good.” ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *POLITICAL WRITINGS* 82–83 (R. W. Dyson ed., Cambridge Univ. Press 2002).

62. VRW at 130. Wollstonecraft encourages women to instill “reason in their affections.” *Id.* at 151.

63. DAVID HUME, *A TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE* 415 (L.A. Selby-Bigge ed., Oxford Univ. Press 1888).

ter of desire—it is only its servant.”⁶⁴

Wollstonecraft is under no misconceptions that this can be difficult, for “certain vices produce certain effects” and it is only by “slow degrees” that we can be healed. She continues: “[I]t is easier to touch the body of a saint, or to be magnetized, than to restrain our appetites or govern our passions; but the health of body or mind can only be recovered by these means”⁶⁵ Wollstonecraft recognizes the connection between mind and body and argues that developing virtue and moral character is an obligation of both men and women, and that the restraint of passion by reason orders liberty to proper ends.

II. VIRTUE IS UNIVERSAL, NOT GENDERED: “VIRTUE HAS ONE ETERNAL STANDARD”

Bound up closely with Wollstonecraft’s emphasis on reason’s role in the refinement of the passions and the attainment of virtue is that the standard of virtue (as with the capacity and obligation to reason) is the same for men and women and requires to be nurtured by liberty. This then means that equal access to education and equal opportunity to use all human faculties must be a foundation of civil society. Yet such access and opportunity are not in a moral vacuum; they come with duties and responsibilities—foremost, men and women are obligated to strive after moral excellence. The center of gravity of Wollstonecraft’s argument is on the development of virtue, so fundamental to character, and the connection between rights and duties and responsibilities for both men and women. Women are the focus because they have been restricted in their ability to develop virtue—indeed, a major thread in her argument is that this has been positively harmful for both men and women because this restriction has perverted the development of virtue and led women to develop “cunning, the natural opponent of strength.”⁶⁶

Wollstonecraft understands the use of reason as the “*one* way appointed by Providence to lead mankind to either virtue or happiness” and draws on the biblical paradigm of Adam and Eve⁶⁷ partaking of

64. Robert P. George, Lecture for the Wheatley Institution: Self-Mastery, Academic Freedom, and the Liberal Arts (Oct. 27, 2008) (transcript available at http://wheatley.byu.edu/publications/documents/Robert_P_George.pdf).

65. VRW at 181–82.

66. *Id.* at 11. And perhaps here there is an intertextual reference to a physically weaker opponent, as noted by Hobbes in *Leviathan*.

67. “Through focusing on culture and on its most revered texts, including the Bible, Wollstonecraft exposes her readers’ prejudices, and moreover traces the process by which gen-

the tree of knowledge *together* to make progress, yet she complains that women are hindered in making further progress by being kept in ignorance and denied access to education and thus a woman's "mind is left to rust."⁶⁸ Wollstonecraft's subtle theological reorientation has also a subtext, not only do Adam and Eve both partake of the fruit, but that perhaps Eve understood first the importance of doing so to make moral progress and allow for the conditions of learning and experience.

Men also hold women back by wrongly attempting to keep them "innocent" and thus women develop only the accoutrements of learning and little understanding.⁶⁹ Rather than intellectual or spiritual growth, women instead seek to please men by an extravagant "fondness for dress" or "ambition in tattooing or painting" the body—all signs, according to Wollstonecraft, of the "want of cultivation of mind."⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft acknowledges certain male stereotypes, such as women being capricious,⁷¹ because "it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason."⁷² She continues, "[l]iberty is the mother of virtue" and virtue can only develop when one "breathe[s] the sharp invigorating air of freedom . . ."⁷³ And duties structure freedom to the development of virtue: "For man is so constituted that he can only attain a proper use of his faculties by exercising them, and will not exercise them unless necessity, of some kind, first set the wheels in motion. Virtues likewise can only be acquired by the discharge of relative duties . . ."⁷⁴

She accuses the "corrupt state of society" as a primary factor that "enslave[s] women by cramping their understanding" and overdevel-

der has been and still is being constructed." MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT xv (Jane Moore ed., Ashgate 2012) (quoting THE WORKS OF MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (Marilyn Butler & Janet Todd eds., 1989)).

68. VRW at 76.

69. *Id.* at 19–20.

70. *Id.* at 186–87.

71. *Id.* at 19.

72. *Id.* at 21.

73. *Id.* at 37. It is only through the exercise of reason that virtue may be developed: "[A] woman with a tolerable understanding . . . whose constitution, strengthened by exercise, has allowed her body to acquire its full vigour; her mind, at the same time, gradually expanding itself to comprehend the moral duties of life, and in what human virtue and dignity consist." *Id.* at 50.

74. *Id.* at 141 ("society is not properly organized which does not compel men and women to discharge their respective duties, by making it the only way to acquire that countenance from their fellow-creatures."). And Wollstonecraft sees "wealth and personal charms" as things that be "blights" to developing virtue. *Id.* at 141.

oping sentiment.⁷⁵ She pities women who have been taught by their mothers to focus on external beauty and who develop “cunning” by showing “*outward* obedience” to thereby secure “the protection of a man” for “at least, twenty years of their lives,”—her sarcasm and perhaps a little scorn are barely concealed.⁷⁶ The reference to twenty years suggests that the man will cast aside the woman who has concentrated exclusively on outward beauty: “let them not expect to be valued when their beauty fades”⁷⁷

Wollstonecraft writes in her introduction of a “barren blooming”—women who have prioritized beauty, which fades long before the woman has attained “maturity.” She attributes this focus to a distorted education, fostered by men, which would make women into “alluring mistresses [rather] than affectionate wives and rational mothers”⁷⁸ She argues that constantly praising “mistaken notions of female excellence” gives rise only to a “sickly delicacy” as well as “false sentiments and overstretched feelings” that actually stifle “truth” and the “natural emotions of the heart” and so “render domestic pleasures insipid.”⁷⁹ Not only does this flowery and false view of women cause them to disdain the “severe duties” of family life, but it also robs them of the capacity, if not the desire, to pursue other goods of life⁸⁰ and “sweetly” they “waste ‘life away.’”⁸¹ They are thus kept in a state of “perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone.”⁸² She asks repeatedly about the fitness of such women who “loiter life away merely employed to adorn her person.”⁸³ “Can they be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world?”⁸⁴ This appeal is meant to call on not only personal self-interest, but the interest of the State, since children are always of primary concern to both parents and the State.

75. *Id.* at 20. Society “degrades [women]” by making them “mere dolls.” *Id.* at 145.

76. *Id.* at 19.

77. *Id.* at 149.

78. *Id.* at 7.

79. *Id.* at 10.

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.* at 149.

82. *Id.* at 9. Wollstonecraft’s deployment of key metaphors in her argument, with their emphasis on maturity, standing up without assistance, becoming an adult all fit the Kantian definition of Enlightenment that he formulated in his famous essay of 1784, “*What is Enlightenment?*” Kant argued that women were kept in an unenlightened state, like children, who could not learn to use their own legs because they were always kept in a walker.

83. *Id.* at 29.

84. *Id.* at 10. This appeal is meant to call on not only personal self-interest, but the interest of the State, since children are always of primary concern to both parents and the State.

Wollstonecraft inveighs against the gendering of “talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character” and suggests that it is not particularly “masculine” or “manly” for a woman to seek after these,⁸⁵ rather it is a “laudable ambition . . . to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex”⁸⁶ and posits that “virtue has one eternal standard.”⁸⁷ She argues that “virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree” and that the “grand end”⁸⁸ of [women’s] exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue.”⁸⁹ This is a crucial point to Wollstonecraft’s argument—she likens it later to having “thrown down my gauntlet,” namely, that there are no “sexual virtues” (virtues that are gender-specific) and that for “man and woman, truth, if I understand the meaning of the word, must be the same” and that virtue is not relative.⁹⁰

Wollstonecraft’s rejection of the divine right of kings in her response to Burke in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) meant that claims to moral leadership in a community must spring from another source. Wollstonecraft makes the moral connection between private virtue and the public good: “Public spirit must be nurtured by private virtue, or it will resemble the factitious sentiment which makes women careful to preserve their reputation, and men their honour.”⁹¹ A “benevolent legislator,” she says, “always endeavours to make it the interest of each individual to be virtuous; and thus private virtue becoming the cement of public happiness . . .”⁹² Again, this

85. *Id.* at 8. Wollstonecraft sometimes uses the phrase “manly” virtues. This is meant rhetorically to underscore that virtue is neither male nor female, although it has been ascribed to men, both must strive to be virtuous and in fact, if one sex is not virtuous it hampers the progress of civilization, but also all interpersonal relationships, including marriage and the family.

86. *Id.* at 9–10. She does leave open the question of men being physically stronger “from the constitution of their bodies” and how that may influence the attainment of virtue. *Id.* at 26. Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft urges women to “acquire strength, both of mind and body.” *Id.* at 9.

87. *Id.* at 26. She later suggests that the “only solid foundation for morality appears to be the character of the supreme Being.” *Id.* at 46.

88. The antecedent here is most interesting as the “grand end” that Wollstonecraft highlights could be construed to be both men and women “connected” or in relationship to each other—this holds with Wollstonecraft’s more explicit passages. Wollstonecraft writes at the start of a paragraph: “Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manner of fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the grand end of their exertions should be to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue.” *Id.* at 26.

89. *Id.*

90. *Id.* at 51.

91. *Id.* at 140.

92. *Id.* at 144.

echoes Thomistic insights into public life, perhaps nowhere more succinctly stated than by Wollstonecraft here: “[P]ublic virtues, must ever grow out of the private character”⁹³ Wollstonecraft also suggests that domestic duties can be better fulfilled when women become “enlightened citizens” and “free . . . to earn their own subsistence”⁹⁴

Although Wollstonecraft perceives that the family is the foundational support of society, she sees that when women engage with the wider world the home will be strengthened and strong homes in turn buttress the community. She charges that the first duty of women is to themselves “as rational creatures” and then to themselves “as citizens” and as mothers.⁹⁵ Citizenship and motherhood are equated because they are mutually supportive roles—to be a good mother is to be a good citizen, not least because the next generation is taught by mothers, but also to be a good citizen strengthens motherhood. She supposes that in the future “society will some time or other be so constituted, that man must necessarily fulfill the duties of a citizen, or be despised, and that while he was employed in any of the departments of civil life, his wife, also an active citizen, should be equally intent to manage her family, educate her children, and assist her neighbours.”⁹⁶

The “peculiar destination of women,” according to Wollstonecraft, is to nurture the mind and body of the “rising generation” therefore “sensible mothers” need to overcome ignorance to be prepared for this duty,⁹⁷ and enlarge their understanding and strengthen their character. How can a woman achieve this? “[B]y being allowed to govern her own conduct” so that she will “have sufficient sense or command of temper to manage her children properly.”⁹⁸ Their minds must “take a wider range” and women must not be barred from any field of endeavor.⁹⁹

Wollstonecraft wonders that “the breeding of horses” and the “management of the stable” were sometimes of greater concern than “paying any attention to the nursery;”¹⁰⁰ indeed, she asserts that some

93. *Id.* at 162.

94. *Id.* at 165.

95. *Id.* at 145.

96. *Id.* at 146.

97. *Id.* at 189.

98. *Id.* at 152.

99. *Id.* at 174. For women “to rend their private virtue a public benefit, they must have a civil existence in the state, married or single” *Id.* at 148–49.

100. *Id.* at 189.

women are fonder of their pets than their “babes” and that she has observed a woman take her “lap-dog to her bosom instead of her child”¹⁰¹ The care of the next generation, in Wollstonecraft’s view, is a part of a woman’s “civil duties” and deserves the “protection of civil laws.”¹⁰² Children, therefore, are the foundation for the State’s interest in marriage as mothers and fathers are the particular guardians and teachers of the children they create together.

Men, too, are called on to lead virtuous lives, indeed, chaste lives (which will be enlarged on later) because sexual libertinism undermines their own abilities, degrades women, and damages society. “The little respect paid to chastity in the male world is, I am persuaded, the grand source of many physical and moral evils that torment mankind, as well as of the vices and follies that degrade and destroy women.”¹⁰³ Wollstonecraft goes against modern notions that would assert that sexual acts committed in privacy do not affect society negatively. She asserts that male sexual libertinism and lust hurt society in very deep ways: the instrumentalization of another person to bring only self-gratification and the objectification of women destroy a range of “social affections”—they harden the heart—that are necessary to create a healthy culture and community by introducing pollution into the moral environment. Perhaps worst of all on Wollstonecraft’s view is that making sex into an act of selfish pleasure-seeking perverts relationships by objectifying others—people are no longer an end in themselves but mere vessels for self-gratification. Thus, illicit sexual relations diminish one’s ability to form human bonds. As such relationships are the bedrock of building communities, civil society itself is thus compromised. She has once again made the connection between private virtue and the public good.¹⁰⁴

The little attention paid to the cultivation of modesty, amongst men, produces great depravity in all the relationships of society; for, not only love—love that ought to purify the heart, and first call forth all the youthful powers, to prepare the man to discharge the benevolent duties of life, is sacrificed to premature lust; but, all the social affections are deadened by selfish gratifications, which very early pollute the mind, and dry up the generous juices of the

101. *Id.* at 172–73.

102. *Id.* at 146.

103. *Id.* at 164.

104. Wollstonecraft here anticipates to some degree what J. D. Unwin (*SEX AND CULTURE*, 1934) and Pitirim Sorokin (*THE AMERICAN SEX REVOLUTION*, 1956) would argue much later through their social science research perspectives.

heart.¹⁰⁵

One might infer here that Wollstonecraft's understanding of healthy sexual relations between a woman and man are those in which sexual relations represent a complete and mutual sharing and giving of the self to the other. The extension of her reasoning would seem to suggest that when men and women alike observe chastity and equally develop virtue in the private sphere, the common good is also served: "Society can only be happy and free in proportion as it is virtuous"¹⁰⁶

Wollstonecraft exclaims at one point in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: "Oh! Virtue, thou art not an empty name! All that life can give—thou givest!"¹⁰⁷ She focuses on one area in particular which she holds up as crucial to the development of virtue: chastity. She goes to great lengths to emphasize that standards of chastity should apply to both males and females. Wollstonecraft argues that it is the lack of chastity in men that has caused misery and not only thwarted the development of virtue for themselves, but enfeebled women's own efforts at forming a virtuous character.

III. CHASTITY FOR ALL—NO MALE EXEMPTION

The thesis and argumentative dynamic of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, including its forthright and urgent tone, require an esoteric reading to controvert what is clearly reasoned and repeated throughout her work about the equal accountability of men and women to the standards of virtue, and specifically of chastity. Once again, here is Wollstonecraft's powerful insight:

The two sexes mutually corrupt and improve each other. This I believe to be an indisputable truth, extending it to every virtue. Chastity, modesty, public spirit, and all the noble train of virtues, on which social virtue and happiness are built, should be understood and cultivated by all mankind, or they will be cultivated to little effect.¹⁰⁸

Men and women need each other to help one another develop virtue, and nowhere in Wollstonecraft's treatise is this more clearly articulated than in the case of chastity.¹⁰⁹

105. *Id.* at 164–65.

106. *Id.* at 169.

107. *Id.* at 120.

108. *Id.* at 140.

109. It is easy to accuse Wollstonecraft of not living up to her ideals on female chastity. After she had worked as a governess and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published, she

Wollstonecraft analyzes the relationship between the sexes and determines that the lack of male chastity in particular, condoned by a sexual double standard, has prevented the development of virtue in men and weakened women. She is clear: “[T]he little chastity found amongst men, and consequent disregard of modesty, tend to degrade both sexes.”¹¹⁰ How are both sexes degraded by a lack of chastity? “This intemperance, so prevalent, depraves the appetite to such a degree, that a wanton stimulus is necessary to rouse it”—here Wollstonecraft recognizes that a lack of chastity, freely giving in to sexual desire, will make men and women “the slaves of casual lust” and that greater and more “wanton stimulus” is necessary to arouse sexual desire.¹¹¹

Wollstonecraft repeats her hypothesis clearly, succinctly, directly and multiple times in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: “I will venture to assert, that all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already enlarged on, branch out of one grand

had a child out of wedlock with the American entrepreneur Gilbert Inlay. After she discovered that he was living with an actress she tried more than once to take her own life. She and William Godwin became lovers and eventually married. Wollstonecraft's second child was born shortly thereafter and Wollstonecraft died of childbed fever. There is no evidence to suggest that Wollstonecraft ever lost sight of what she believed to be true when she penned *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. One might speculate that perhaps in her darkest hours of the Inlay affair, when she was suicidal, Wollstonecraft might have felt keenly a bitter irony: “[M]en boast of their [sexual] triumphs over women, what do they boast of? Truly the creature of sensibility was surprised by her sensibility into folly—into vice; and the dreadful reckoning falls heavily on her own weak head, when reason wakes. For where art thou to find comfort, forlorn and disconsolate one? He who ought to have directed thy reason, and supported thy weakness, has betrayed thee! In a dream of passion thou consented to wander through flowery lawns, and heedlessly stepping over the precipice to which thy guide, instead of guarding, lured thee, thou startest from thy dream only to face a sneering, frowning world, and to find thyself alone in a waste, for he that triumphed in thy weakness is now pursuing new conquests.” *Id.* at 126.

110. *Id.* at 193.

111. *Id.* at 138. Wollstonecraft's insights are now supported by social science and other research into the personal and social costs of pornography and the sexual hook-up culture. *See, e.g.*, THE SOCIAL COSTS OF PORNOGRAPHY. A COLLECTION OF PAPERS (James R. Stoner, Jr. & Donna M. Hughes eds., Witherspoon Institute, 2010); WILLIAM M. STRUTHERS, WIRED FOR INTIMACY: HOW PORNOGRAPHY HIJACKS THE MALE BRAIN (2010); GAIL DINES, PORNLAND: HOW PORN HAS HIJACKED OUR SEXUALITY (2010); PAMELA PAUL, PORNIIFIED: HOW PORNOGRAPHY IS TRANSFORMING OUR LIVES, OUR RELATIONSHIPS, AND OUR FAMILIES (2010). On the destructive nature of the hook-up culture, *see* MIRIAM GROSSMAN, UNPROTECTED. A CAMPUS PSYCHIATRIST REVEALS HOW POLITICAL CORRECTNESS IN HER PROFESSION ENDANGERS EVERY STUDENT (Sentinel 2007); LAURA SESSIONS STEPP, UNHOOKED. HOW YOUNG WOMEN PURSUE SEX, DELAY LOVE AND LOSE AT BOTH (Penguin 2008) (2007); DAWN EDEN, THE THRILL OF THE CHASTE: FINDING FULFILLMENT WHILE KEEPING YOUR CLOTHES ON (2006); JENNIFER ROBACK MORSE, SMART SEX: FINDING LIFE-LONG LOVE IN A HOOK-UP WORLD (2005); DONNA FREITAS, THE END OF SEX: HOW HOOKUP CULTURE IS LEAVING A GENERATION UNHAPPY, SEXUALLY UNFULFILLED, AND CONFUSED ABOUT INTIMACY (2013).

cause—want of chastity in men.”¹¹² Wollstonecraft considers how the lack of sexual restraint in men injures women and she observes that such restraint is not arbitrary or relative, emerging from social constructions, but rather on her view spring from a divine source as “wholesome restraints which a just conception of the character of God imposes.”¹¹³

On one level are the sexual predators, those who have “lawless appetites”¹¹⁴ and “take advantage of unsuspecting tenderness”¹¹⁵ and women thus seduced who have “lost [their] honour” are “ruined before they know the difference between virtue and vice.”¹¹⁶ Wollstonecraft has a “lively compassion” for such women who have made an error in judgment and cries out not for asylums¹¹⁷ but for justice: “It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world!”¹¹⁸ She likens such men, whose “appetites are more depraved by unbridled indulgence” and sexual “gluttony,”¹¹⁹ those who “dupe their lovers,” to political “tyrants” who want a “slave”¹²⁰ much as sensualists see women as a mere “play-thing”¹²¹ or a “toy of man” or a “rattle.”¹²² Her words convey powerfully her understanding of the objectification of women and her analogy shows once again the connections she makes be-

112. VRW at 138.

113. *Id.* at 46. It is fascinating to speculate on what Wollstonecraft held to be the character of God. An inference from her argument might suggest that God is a loving parent. Moreover, given her emphasis on the joint and complementary roles of mother and father, could one extrapolate further, that her theological conception might have encompassed a similar divine binary?

114. *Id.* at 139. Wollstonecraft suggests that the increasing desire of a “lustful prowler” to indulge his sexual appetite can lead to him seeking out “equivocal beings.” See Carol Poston’s footnote to page 138.

115. *Id.* at 56.

116. *Id.* at 71. Wollstonecraft is compassionate towards women who make a mistake in judgment and does not believe that a woman’s character is suddenly transformed negatively. She references Catherine Macaulay who addresses “the trite and foolish observation, that the first fault against chastity in woman has a radical power to deprave the character. But no such frail beings come out of the hands of nature.” Often women “are thrown into a state of desperation, by the venomous rancor of their own sex.” *Id.* at 137. It is passages such as these that lead me to be less certain than Cora Kaplan is that “degraded women” are “remorselessly pilloried” in Wollstonecraft’s text. Kaplan, *Wild Nights*, *supra* note 18, at 342.

117. Wollstonecraft is also concerned about “prostitutes, who infest the streets of this metropolis, raising alternate emotions of pity and disgust.” VRW at 122.

118. *Id.* at 71. Those who seduce women “should be *legally* obliged to maintain the women and her children.” *Id.*

119. *Id.* at 137.

120. *Id.* at 47 (“Why do [men] expect virtue from a slave, from a being whom the constitution of civil society has rendered weak, if not vicious?”).

121. *Id.* at 24.

122. *Id.* at 34. (“She was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused.”).

tween virtue, or in this case vice, in one's personal life as being essentially connected to the political world. She analogizes sexual predators to political tyrants in the wider world.

It is the sexual objectification of women that appears to do the greater damage to both men and women:

To adulterous lust the most sacred duties are sacrificed, because before marriage, men, by a promiscuous intimacy with women, learned to consider love as a selfish gratification—learned to separate it not only from esteem, but from the affection merely built on habit, which mixes a little humanity with it. Justice and friendship are also set at defiance, and that purity of taste is vitiated which would naturally lead a man to relish an artless display of affection rather than affected airs.¹²³

The real harm that Wollstonecraft throws into relief here is that promiscuity and polyamory lead to a denigration and lack of respect for women, including one's spouse, and, in her view, these lead one to become less humane.¹²⁴

She gives women cautionary advice to avoid rakes and immoral men, because even if swept up in the combination of lively emotions and dazzled by wit, wealth, or high societal standing she warns that “the day of reckoning” must surely come when “the sprightly lover” is turned “into a surly suspicious tyrant, who contemptuously insults the very weakness he fostered.”¹²⁵ After he has satiated his lust and his “brutal indulgences” then the “zest” and “varnish” will fade and “when the gloss of novelty is worn off, and pleasure palls upon the sense, lasciviousness becomes barefaced, and enjoyment only the desperate effort of weakness flying from reflection as from a legion of devils.”¹²⁶ Wollstonecraft recognizes that the effort to separate sexuality from its unitive and procreative meanings in marriage is doomed to fail. Any illicit pleasure will be short-lived for it is marital love that harmonizes sexuality to its expansive and proper and life-sharing and life-giving purposes. And she hints that this understanding is perceived even when people behave immorally—thus, pleasure-seeking becomes a flight from truth for “reflection” or something like pietistic pondering and self-examination would intimate, teach, and point a person in reflective moments to these deeper and perhaps even self-

123. *Id.* at 192–93.

124. *Id.* at 71. She sees adultery as “a natural divorcement” and that a woman should “demand respect” from a faithless husband and “not be treated like a prostitute.” *Id.*

125. *Id.* at 120.

126. *Id.*

evident meanings.¹²⁷

She sees that male sexual libertinism is an inducement for females to behave according to what attracts immoral men—so they reduce themselves to meet the degraded expectations of such men. Wollstonecraft summarizes how sexual liberation “depraves both sexes” and hurts the most vulnerable amongst us—the unborn and children:

To satisfy this genus of men [a sexually immoral man ‘who has riot-ed among women, spreading depravity and misery’], women are made systematically voluptuous, and though they may not all carry their libertinism to the same height, yet this heartless intercourse with the sex, which they allow themselves, depraves both sexes, because the taste of men is vitiated; and women, of all classes, naturally square their behaviour to gratify the taste by which they obtain pleasure and power. Women becoming, consequently, weaker, in mind and body, than they ought to be, were one of the grand ends of their being taken into account, that of bearing and nursing children, have not sufficient strength to discharge the first duty of a mother; and sacrificing to lasciviousness the parental affection, that ennobles instinct, either destroy the embryo in the womb, or cast it off when born. Nature in every thing demands respect, and those who violate her laws seldom violate them with impunity. The weak enervated women who particularly catch the attention of libertines, are unfit to be mothers, though they may conceive¹²⁸

Aside from its unflinching comment on abortion and abandonment, this passage suggests that moral turpitude undermines character and dissipates the resources (intellectual, emotional, moral, and even physical) that are needed to be a good parent.

Wollstonecraft understands that women “square their behaviour” to male expectations and behaviour, but she also recognizes that as with dissenting sects, female character is formed by persecution as well: “Oppression thus formed many of the features of their character”¹²⁹ In order to make themselves attractive to sensualists “vanity” leads women to “neglecting every domestic duty; nay, even squandering away all the money which should have been saved for

127. Wollstonecraft certainly believes that spiritual pondering in reverent moments or “the still hour of self-reflection” can help us improve morally: “We should rather endeavor to view ourselves as we suppose that Being views us who seeth each thought ripen into action, and whose judgment never swerves from the eternal rule of right. Righteous are all his judgments—just as merciful! The humble mind that seeketh to find favour in His sight, and calmly examines its conduct when only His presence is felt, will seldom form a very erroneous opinion of its own virtues.” *Id.* at 135.

128. *Id.* at 138–39.

129. *Id.* at 193–94.

their helpless younger children”¹³⁰ and “tears the smiling babe from the breast that ought to afford it nourishment.”¹³¹ Rather than discharging important domestic duties, married women experience “indolence”¹³² and “value accomplishments more than virtues.”¹³³ Wollstonecraft describes how:

[W]hen a woman is admired for her beauty, and suffers herself to be so far intoxicated by the admiration she receives, as to neglect to discharge the indispensable duty of a mother, she sins against herself by neglecting to cultivate an affection that would equally tend to make her useful and happy.¹³⁴

She rails against the spurious view that would focus merely on outward reputation and not the deeper development of moral character. Women behave hypocritically by being taught that their energy should be put into maintaining “reputation, not chastity and all its fair train” and that “they are employed to keep [reputation] free from spot, not as a virtue, but to preserve their station in the world.”¹³⁵ She sees that such an approach can lead to distortions and a sham virtue: “If the honour of a woman, as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front. . . .”¹³⁶ Her call is to remember that the substance of chastity as a virtue is essential, less so the superficial dimension. Her call for a “revolution in female manners” is to “restore to [women] their lost dignity”¹³⁷ and that “by reforming themselves [they] reform the world.”¹³⁸

Just as the pursuit of virtue in the formation of moral character is the same for men and women, Wollstonecraft argues that both men and women can be corrupted by “practising or fostering vice”¹³⁹ and she calls for mutual respect for each other to preserve dignity and morality: “cherish such an habitual respect for mankind as may prevent us from disgusting a fellow-creature for the sake of a present indulgence.”¹⁴⁰

130. *Id.* at 132.

131. *Id.* at 167.

132. *Id.* at 138.

133. *Id.* at 167.

134. *Id.* at 142.

135. *Id.* at 132.

136. *Id.* at 137.

137. *Id.* at 45.

138. *Id.*

139. *Id.*

140. *Id.* at 137.

There is also another preventative layer to preserving and fostering virtue and avoiding vice. She teaches first of all, as has been argued already, that sexual distinctions in the areas of virtue and chastity do not exist,¹⁴¹ but she also calls on both men and women to be equally modest:

“Modesty must be equally cultivated by both sexes”¹⁴² and “modesty must be universally accepted.”¹⁴³ Swift recognizes the importance of modesty in Wollstonecraft’s thinking: “modesty . . . is to become an ideal rationalized praxis” and that the “regulation of female conduct through modesty is to be transformed into a regulation of a universally human character; tropes of female propriety will provide analogies for the imagining of an intersubjective respect between the sexes that exists under reason.”¹⁴⁴

Wollstonecraft recognizes that all people have human failings “and have vices, hid, perhaps, from human eye, that bend me to the dust before God, and loudly tell me, when all is mute, that we are formed of the same earth, and breathe the same element.” Women and men must exercise humility to be fully human: “Humanity thus rises naturally out of humility”¹⁴⁵ As women and men assist each other in their mutual aim to develop virtue, they assist one another rather than tear one another down, and the aim of their behaviour and interactions is based in a divine motivation and model. Taylor calls it a “de-eroticised standard of modesty for both sexes” that “denotes purity of mind and body” for women and men.¹⁴⁶ Wollstonecraft’s standard is derived from God “on whose own virtues human conduct must be modelled.”¹⁴⁷

There is no question that Wollstonecraft advocates the equality of men and women in human dignity, capacity and obligation to reason, and accountability to the same standard of chastity and virtue. Yet, there is also complementarity of the sexes in marriage and family life, directed by “the parental design of nature”¹⁴⁸ as Wollstonecraft

141. *Id.* at 193. Wollstonecraft notes clearly that the “sexual distinction which men have so warmly insisted upon, is arbitrary.” *Id.*

142. *Id.* at 126.

143. *Id.* at 193. “I think [personal reserve is] *equally* necessary in both sexes.” *Id.* at 128.

144. *Id.* at 100.

145. *Id.* at 136.

146. TAYLOR, THE FEMINIST IMAGINATION, *supra* note 7, at 120.

147. *Id.*

148. VRW at 138. “The primacy of the category of nature within feminine discourse can be traced back, however, at least as far as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.” Sylvana Tomaselli, *The Enlightenment Debate on Women*, in MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT 115 (Jane Moore ed., Ashgate 2012).

calls it. And the realm for which female leadership is especially important is in motherhood. As Myers points out Wollstonecraft “exalts . . . above all, mothering.”¹⁴⁹

IV. MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD, AND FAMILY LIFE

It is in marriage, motherhood, and family that Wollstonecraft culminates her philosophical ideas on virtue, reason guiding the passions, and the relationship between private virtue and the public good. Above all, “personal fidelity” in marriage allows “endearing charities to flow” and “give a sanctity to the tie”¹⁵⁰ and the “unadorned” yet “noble simplicity of affection” do nothing less than “cement the matrimonial tie.”¹⁵¹ Marriage transforms and elevates us and is “the parent of those endearing charities which draw man from the brutal herd.”¹⁵²

The word “brutal” or “brutality” conveys the kind of hardening of the humane that occurs when one gives way to profligacy and licentiousness in relationships: that “love soon sinks into lasciviousness when the exercise of a duty is sacrificed to its indulgence” and urges that “when even two virtuous young people marry” that it would be beneficial if their passions were checked to foster a “match founded on esteem.”¹⁵³ This kind of mature and stable marriage, one that fosters “the calm satisfaction of friendship, and the tender confidence of habitual esteem” is in the “real interest” of women.¹⁵⁴ It is also in the best interest of children, for Wollstonecraft discerns something about the marital relationship and a child’s learning: she argues that “children will never be properly educated till friendship subsists between parents.”¹⁵⁵ Much is made, and correctly so, about education in her treatise, but here she touches on something beyond schooling—it is the assertion that “proper” education, the development of the moral character as she calls it elsewhere,¹⁵⁶ happens at home in the everyday family life in an environment when both mother and father adhere to

149. VRW at 328.

150. *Id.* at 71.

151. *Id.* at 192–93.

152. *Id.* at 192.

153. *Id.* at 73.

154. *Id.* at 104.

155. *Id.* at 192–93. See W. BRADFORD WILCOX & KATHLEEN KOVNER KLINE, GENDER AND PARENTHOOD: BIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES (Columbia Univ. Press 2013).

156. VRW at 165.

a stable relationship of mutual affection and respect and dignity—when they are true friends. What is it that Wollstonecraft might mean? Perhaps she understands that children become confident and can more easily turn to learning when they feel secure about the relationship between their mother and father. Or maybe she believes that children need what both parents provide¹⁵⁷ as role models of the complementarity of woman and man and how they ought to interact—with loving kindness and genuine respect.

In any case, marriage must be the joining of friends and the deepening of the friendship between a man and a woman by sharing all of themselves with each other: “friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love.” Love as passion—“passions are spurs to action, and open the mind”¹⁵⁸ yet, let “*reason* teach passion to submit to necessity”¹⁵⁹ and “let the dignified pursuit of virtue and knowledge raise the mind above those emotions which rather imbitter than sweeten the cup of life, when they are not restrained within due bounds.”¹⁶⁰ Sometimes Wollstonecraft is accused of suggesting that love must die in marriage, yet this is not the case—in fact, the opposite holds true in her view. When wife and husband fulfill simple domestic duties, bridle passions and nurture marital fidelity: “mutual affection, supported by mutual respect”¹⁶¹ kindles the “warmer passions” that parents need for family life.¹⁶² Wollstonecraft likens the fulfilling of plain domestic duties and building character over time to ripening fruit—the exercise of such basic duties develops virtue. She also likens it to the commonplace nature of bread in that some duties are so unspectacular that they are hardly noticed, but just as bread is said to be the staff of life so, too, is the fulfillment of mundane duties.¹⁶³

Wollstonecraft allows that family life is demanding and challeng-

157. See JENET JACOB ERICKSON, *FATHERS DON’T MOTHER AND MOTHERS DON’T FATHER: WHAT SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH INDICATES ABOUT THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS TO CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT* (2015), http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2519862. (last visited Aug. 28, 2015).

158. VRW at 30.

159. *Id.* at 31.

160. *Id.*

161. *Id.* at 192.

162. *Id.* at 193.

163. *Id.* at 74 (“Pleasure prepares the fading wreath, and mixes the intoxicating cup; but the fruit which virtue gives, is the recompence of toil: and, gradually seen as it ripens, only affords calm satisfaction; nay, appearing to be the result of the natural tendency of things, it is scarcely observed. Bread, the common food of life, seldom thought of as a blessing, support the constitution and preserves health; still feasts delight the heart of man, though disease and even death lurk in the cup or dainty that elevates the spirits or tickles the palate.”).

ing and enormously hard work and that “warmer passions” are necessary—the deep love that parents have for their children and for each other—to raise a family. She notes that “grand passions” are “only true to the sentiment, and feeds on itself” as they are not “proportioned to the puny enjoyments of life.”¹⁶⁴ “The welfare of society is not built on extraordinary exertions;”¹⁶⁵ however, it is the simple domestic duties that direct our passions so that they are ordered to the goods of marriage and family life.

She warns that “romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling” can lead women to “waste their lives in imagining how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day, all day.”¹⁶⁶ Wollstonecraft eschews this kind of unreality and when she speaks of the “dying flame” and the “natural death of love,” love is defined here as “ardent affection,” yet emerging from the shell of that love is virtuous “friendship.”¹⁶⁷ It is through the discharge of duties that a marriage deepens, grows well beyond short-lived emotional enthusiasms and mere physical attraction, and develops “calmly” into “friendship—in that tender intimacy which is the best refuge from care” as husband and wife “discharge the sober duties of life.”¹⁶⁸ Marriage is, on Wollstonecraft’s terms, the habitus of abiding and life-long friendship, not a constantly heightened sense of emotion.¹⁶⁹

The “sober duties of life” are also the “higher” ones for which love and reason—no death of love here—tempers and guides the passions: “[S]uch a degree of equality should be established between the sexes as would shut out gallantry and coquetry, yet allow friendship and love to temper the heart for the discharge of higher duties.”¹⁷⁰ Friendship holds a special place for Wollstonecraft and she states plainly that the “most holy band of society is friendship.”¹⁷¹

For Wollstonecraft, there needs to be a deeper bond between a

164. *Id.* at 32.

165. *Id.* at 64.

166. *Id.* at 33.

167. *Id.* at 50.

168. *Id.* at 119.

169. Wollstonecraft’s nuptial logic is reminiscent of a line of one of Bonhoeffer’s letters of counsel on marriage written from a Nazi concentration camp: “It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.” DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *LETTERS AND PAPERS FROM PRISON* (DIETRICH BONHOEFFER WORKS 8) 83 (Fortress 2010).

170. *Id.* at 169.

171. *Id.* at 30. Friendship is also important for Aquinas. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *POLITICAL WRITINGS* 31 (R.W. Dyson ed., 2002).

husband and wife than mere sexual attraction. A woman's "charms" "cannot have much effect on her husband when they are seen every day, when the summer is passed and gone"¹⁷² and Wollstonecraft calculates that the mortification of a woman's pride in this way may well lead, in a person of weak character (i.e., one who has been taught to be servile and amuse through outward appearance and coquetry), to seek and "please other men" or become bitter¹⁷³ or to "pine in secret."¹⁷⁴ She states the matter plainly: "without virtue, a sexual attachment must expire"¹⁷⁵ and perhaps the inverse, then, is that where virtue is found in a marriage, a sexual attachment persists.

As men and women fulfill their duties to their children, their marriages transform—they graduate from mere physical attraction to mutual respect and loyalty and friendship—they attain a kind of marital freedom. Thus, marriage in this sense becomes strongest when freedom exists for this is also the fount of individuality and uniqueness. And bearing and rearing children, Wollstonecraft insists, are special ends for women: "[T]he rearing of children, that is, the laying a foundation of sound health both of body and mind in the rising generation, has justly been insisted on as the peculiar destination of woman . . ."¹⁷⁶ Wollstonecraft, who was for a time a governess and then a single mother herself, does not denigrate the enormous work that it takes to manage a home, nor does she underestimate the psychological and emotional¹⁷⁷ and physical dedication needed to raise children: "In the regulation of a family, in the education of children, understanding, in an unsophisticated sense, is particularly required: strength both of body and mind . . ."¹⁷⁸ Thus, "till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks."¹⁷⁹

At this point, Wollstonecraft's argument has a symmetry to it—it is not only a call to women, but it is overtly (she states it plainly) a call to men, to men to elevate who they are, for both sexes to recognize that chastity and modesty are foundational to a marriage and

172. VRW at 27.

173. *Id.*

174. *Id.* at 65.

175. *Id.* at 192.

176. *Id.* at 189. Although used in a different context, motherhood would seem indeed to allow women "to co-operate . . . with the supreme Being." *Id.* at 21.

177. See Rebecca Erickson, *Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, and the Division of Household Labor*, 67 J. MARRIAGE FAM. 337–51 (2005).

178. VRW at 64.

179. *Id.* at 40.

family. Rather than stating that libertine men who are given to sensuality are as good as it gets—she challenges men to remember “their duties [as] husbands and fathers”¹⁸⁰ for the care of children is a “sacred task.”¹⁸¹ Men are to rise up and be virtuous, even as women must. “The two sexes,” as has been cited previously, “mutually corrupt and improve each other”¹⁸² and men and women must become partners in marriage, and for this to occur men must come to respect women as “companions rather than their mistresses.”¹⁸³ Yet there is more: women and men need each other to become spiritually refined together. The sexes complement one another and help one another to be virtuous, as she puts it in a biblical allusion, for God has called us to “be pure even as your heavenly Father is pure.”¹⁸⁴

She contends that private virtue in the marital sphere supports the public one: “The conclusion which I wish to draw, is obvious; make women rational creatures, and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives, and mothers; that is—if men do not neglect the duties of husbands and fathers.”¹⁸⁵ Sometimes Wollstonecraft is very specific in her recommendations, such as her suggestion “to promote early marriages” for from these “the most salutary physical and moral effects naturally flow.”¹⁸⁶ She seems to assume here that marrying at a younger age provides the opportunity for a particularly strong bond.¹⁸⁷ Wollstonecraft posits that married people make good citizens, perhaps because children and families intercon-

180. *Id.* at 178. See also W. Bradford Wilcox, *The Distinct, Positive Impact of a Good Dad*, THE ATLANTIC (Sept. 8, 2015, 5:00 PM), <http://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/06/the-distinct-positive-impact-of-a-good-dad/276874/>.

181. VRW at 103. It is here in identifying the care of children as a “sacred task” that Wollstonecraft draws together two strands of her thinking—her belief in God and the connection of God to the purposes of the family. On the “double helix” of faith and family see MARY EBERSTADT, *HOW THE WEST REALLY LOST GOD: A NEW THEORY OF SECULARIZATION* (Templeton Press 2013).

182. *Id.* at 140.

183. *Id.* at 165.

184. *Id.* at 47. Poston sees this as alluding to Matthew 5:48: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” See *id.* at 47 n.7, and certainly the linguistic rhythm seems to be mirrored, but there may well also be resonances with 1 John 3:3: “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” This verse establishes Christ as pure and puts the male and female in an agentive position as they need to model themselves in purity on Christ and be responsible to purify their own behavior.

185. *Id.* at 178.

186. *Id.* at 168–69. See also Brian J. Willoughby et al., “When Are You Getting Married?” *The Intergenerational Transmission of Attitudes Regarding Marital Timing and Marital Importance*, 33 J. FAM. ISSUES 223–45 (2012).

187. See the research of Kay Hymowitz, Jason Carroll, W. Brad Wilcox, and Kelleen Kaye. <http://twentysomethingmarriage.org/summary/> (last visited Nov. 14, 2015).

nect one to a community and on her reasoning marriage appears to make one less selfish: “What a different character does a married citizen assume from the selfish coxcomb, who lives, but for himself, and who is often afraid to marry lest he should not be able to live in a certain style.”¹⁸⁸ Mitzi Myers has noted Wollstonecraft’s connection between a strong marriage and a robust civic life “depends on the private virtue nourished by chaste fathers and ‘patriot’ mothers. Marriage civilizes man, families school humanitarian republicans, and domestic affections cement the general good.”¹⁸⁹

Wollstonecraft’s vision of a flourishing society is one in which men and women support one another in their complementary roles in the development of virtues directed by reason and affection: “I will venture to predict that virtue will never prevail in society till the virtues of both sexes are founded on reason; and, till the affections common to both are allowed to gain their due strength by the discharge of mutual duties.”¹⁹⁰ Yet, she does not agree that men and women have all of the same duties, although they are of the same kind and supported by the same principles: “Women, I allow, may have different duties to fulfil; but they are *human* duties, and the principles that should regulate the discharge of them, I sturdily maintain, must be the same.”¹⁹¹ Wollstonecraft declares that a woman must be allowed to “act freely from the light of her own reason,”¹⁹² yet this sphere of action is structured (for men as well) according to duties that are derived from “reason and religion” and there are specific “duties of wives and mothers.”¹⁹³ Wollstonecraft minces no

188. VRW at 169.

189. *Id.* at 328. Mitzi Myers, *Reform or Ruin: A Revolution in Female Manners, in A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN. AN AUTHORITATIVE TEXT BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS CRITICISMS* (Deidre Shauna Lynch ed., Norton 2009). Myers again: “On the contrary, Wollstonecraft aggrandizes, heroizes the maternal mission, elevating woman’s status by making her familial roles the linchpin of a new society. Although she does not suggest that woman’s only possible place is the home, motherhood provides a pervasive rationale for better education, as well as for civil existence and work. The more enlightened understanding women acquire, the more they will take to those offices nature annexes to their gender. As ‘active citizen,’ the average woman will advance the common welfare by managing her family, educating her children, and assisting her neighbors, also standing ready for work outside the home to facilitate family maintenance if necessary. In thus carrying out her communal obligations, she eludes the spirit of degrading dependence and self-respectingly earns her keep, while also developing her own autonomous moral character.” *Id.*

190. VRW at 165.

191. *Id.* at 51.

192. *Id.* at 187.

193. *Id.* at 147. There must be other avenues of “usefulness and independence”—“women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government.” *Id.*

words on this subject. For her there is a “maternal character” and a “sphere” in which this operates: “So forcibly does this truth strike me, that I would rest the whole tendency of my reasoning upon it, for whatever tends to incapacitate the maternal character, takes woman out of her sphere.”¹⁹⁴ Mitzi Myers has understood that Wollstonecraft does not want “to pluck most women out of their families or dis sever them from their relative duties,” but rather *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* guides women “back to nature, reason, and virtue” and to “enlightened domesticity.”¹⁹⁵

Wollstonecraft asserts a nature-directed biological duty and destiny for women: “As the care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature, this duty would afford many forcible arguments for strengthening the female understanding, if it were properly considered.”¹⁹⁶ Myers proffers that it is on this point that Wollstonecraft is criticized:

Like Mill, Wollstonecraft has recently been faulted as a feminist theorist for failing to challenge the nuclear family as an institution or to question its constraints on female life. Her acceptance of natural sex roles, of rationalized marriage and motherhood as public service in the national interest, it is argued, limits her application of egalitarian principles to woman. But for Wollstonecraft nature and reason validate the bourgeois family as a key corrective to the sins of an oppressive, class-bound establishment.¹⁹⁷

Indeed, Wollstonecraft contends that for women to be “properly attentive to domestic duties” they must “respect themselves,”¹⁹⁸ that all avenues of knowledge ought to be open to women, including “political and moral subjects”¹⁹⁹ for she holds that an “[a]ctive mind embraces the whole circle of its duties, and finds time enough for all . . . it is not the enchantment of literary pursuits, or the steady investigation of scientific subjects,²⁰⁰ that leads women astray from duty. No,

194. *Id.* at 177.

195. Myers, *Reform or Ruin: A Revolution in Female Manners*, *supra* note 189, at 336–37.

196. VRW, *supra* note 1, at 151.

197. Myers, *Reform or Ruin: A Revolution in Female Manners*, *supra* note 189, at 337.

198. VRW at 169–70. As a woman’s “intellectual empire” extends and as her judgment increases “to manage her children” she “will not submit . . . to her husband, or patiently to the social laws which make a nonentity of a wife.” *Id.* at 177.

199. The “management of their household and children need not shut them out from literature, or prevent their attaching themselves to a science, with that steady eye which strengthens the mind, or practising one of the fine arts that cultivate the taste.” *Id.* at 191.

200. Vivien Jones sees the unresolved tensions in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* as Mary Wollstonecraft urges women to heed nature and be mothers in the home, but also her support of educated women who may well be drawn out of the home and sees it as: “part of the

it is indolence and vanity—the love of pleasure and the love of sway, that will reign paramount in an empty mind.”²⁰¹

Wollstonecraft also appeals to the self-interest of men, even as she reminds them of their duty to:

[M]ake [women] free, and they will quickly become wise and virtuous, as men become more so; for the improvement must be mutual, or the injustice which one half of the human race are obliged to submit to, retorting to their oppressors, the virtue of men will be worm-eaten by the insect whom he keeps under his feet.²⁰²

She reminds men that: “The weakness of the mother will be visited on the children! And whilst women are educated to rely on their husbands for judgment, this must ever be the consequence, for there is no improving an understanding by halves.”²⁰³ Wollstonecraft also points out that a husband may die²⁰⁴ or one may have the misfortune to be married to a debauched man.²⁰⁵

Wollstonecraft understands that the “formation of the mind must be begun very early, and the temper, in particular, requires the most judicious attention”²⁰⁶ and that mothers play a foundational role in the formation of character: “For every violation of justice and reason, in the treatment of children, weakens their reason. And, so early do

tradition of writings on female education within which proto-feminist claims for rational equality and intellectual independence are in constant tension with the pragmatic demands of a sexual division of labour and/or a belief that girls’ education must appropriately reflect inherent sexual differences. Not surprisingly, these educational writings are, in other words, a site on which the tension within Enlightenment discourses between rationalist arguments for gender equality and functionalist arguments for ‘natural’ difference is played out particularly clearly.” Vivien Jones, *Advice and Enlightenment: Mary Wollstonecraft and Sex Education*, in *WOMEN, GENDER AND ENLIGHTENMENT* 181 (Sarah Knott & Barbara Taylor eds., 2005).

201. VRW at 169–70. Wollstonecraft holds that “wealth and beauty” and the “gratuitously granted” privileges of the female sex make it more difficult to develop virtue, which is developed by “knowledge, by industry, by patience, by self-denial.” *Id.* at 57–58.

202. *Id.* at 175.

203. *Id.* at 177.

204. *Id.* at 48. Wollstonecraft further reminds readers that a husband “may die and leave her [his wife] with a large family. A double duty devolves on her; to educate them [the children] in the character of both father and mother; to form their principles and secure their property.” *Id.*

205. *See id.* at 46 (“Many poor women maintain their children by the sweat of their brow, and keep together families that the vices of the fathers would have scattered abroad; but gentlewomen are too indolent to be actively virtuous, and are softened rather than refined by civilization. Indeed, the good sense which I have met with, among the poor women who have had few advantages of education, and yet have acted heroically, strongly confirmed me in the opinion that trifling employments have rendered woman a trifler.”).

206. *Id.* at 151. *See also* Jenet Jacob Erickson, *Does Having a Mother Really Matter?*, LOVE AND FIDELITY http://www.loveandfidelity.org/online_journal/does-having-a-mother-really-matter-by-dr-jenet-erickson/ (last visited Sept. 14, 2015).

they catch a character, that the base of the moral character, experience leads me to infer, is fixed before their seventh year, the period during which women are allowed the sole management of children.”²⁰⁷

Parents have an overriding duty to children, namely, to “form the heart and enlarge the understanding”²⁰⁸ and to teach children to exercise their reason and to respect modesty and chastity.²⁰⁹ Wollstonecraft recommends explaining to one’s children:

It is your interest to obey me till you can judge for yourself; and the Almighty Father of all has implanted an affection in me to serve as a guard to you whilst your reason is unfolding; but when your mind arrives at maturity, you must only obey me, or rather respect my opinions, so far as they coincide with the light that is breaking in on your own mind.²¹⁰

The family, the “home,” is a school to train affection and “youthful sympathies” as parents prepare children to serve the common good.²¹¹ Wollstonecraft places such a heavy emphasis on the family as the ideal environment to raise children that she asserts that “moral character . . . can only be acquired at home.”²¹²

When a parent “sets a good example, [and] patiently lets that example work” she proposes that “it seldom fails to produce its natural effect—filial reverence.”²¹³ Moreover, such “[a] parent acquires all the rights of the most sacred friendship, and his advice, even when his child is advanced in life, demands serious consideration.”²¹⁴ Thus, just as nursing a child creates a bond between mother and child, teaching a child in patience and love creates a filial bond that lasts a lifetime.²¹⁵ Wollstonecraft attempts to paint a vivid picture to show readers—having at this point witnessed as a governess how much sacrifice raising a child requires—how this filial bond might one day look:

207. VRW at 190. *See also* James Heckman, *Invest in Childhood Development: Reduce Deficits, Strengthen the Economy*, HECKMANEQUATION.ORG, <http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/invest-early-childhood-development-reduce-deficits-strengthen-economy> (last visited Sept. 8, 2015).

208. VRW at 153.

209. *Id.* at 164.

210. *Id.* at 154.

211. *Id.* at 162.

212. *Id.* at 165. Wollstonecraft’s reasoning here again accords with some much later social science research. *See* JAMES Q. WILSON, *THE MORAL SENSE* 141–63 (1993).

213. *Id.* at 155.

214. *Id.* at 153.

215. *Id.* at 112. Parents: those who spare children “labour and sorrow” in attaining knowledge “should not complain, if [the children] are neither wise nor virtuous.” *Id.*

I think I see her [the mother] surrounded by her children, reaping the reward of her care. The intelligent eye meets hers, whilst health and innocence smile on their chubby cheeks, and as they grow up the cares of life are lessened by their grateful attention. She lives to see the virtues which she endeavoured to plant on principles, fixed into habits, to see her children attain a strength of character sufficient to enable them to endure adversity without forgetting their mother's example.

And she recasts the words of a parable of Jesus: "Behold, thou [mother] gavest me [the child] a talent—and here are five talents."²¹⁶ It is not coincidental that Wollstonecraft has the mother stand in the place of the Lord, for on her view a mother is a teacher, nurturer, and exemplar of virtue—as the father is meant to be.

Being a parent teaches one a central element in the development of virtue, as Wollstonecraft sees it, the virtue of sacrifice and the deferring of one's personal satisfaction on behalf of a child: "To fulfil domestic duties much resolution is necessary, and a serious kind of perseverance that requires a more firm support than emotions, however lively and true to nature." A parent or spouse will want to "prefer the future good of the beloved object to a present gratification."²¹⁷ The moral character to choose the other over the self is important to Wollstonecraft. Similarly, she holds that the discipline to not gratify "blind impulses" in pursuit of "some imaginary present good" and to take a longer view rather than be "short-sighted" is crucial to living a principled life, as is endurance:²¹⁸ "How few!—how very few! have sufficient foresight, or resolution, to endure a small evil at the moment, to avoid a greater hereafter."²¹⁹ We must be "willing to pay the price fixed by nature," avers Wollstonecraft: "I have before had occasion to observe, that a right always includes a duty; and I think it may, likewise, fairly be inferred, that they forfeit the right, who do not fulfil the duty."²²⁰ Marriages are strengthened through the discharge of mutual duties. Wollstonecraft provides a simple yet striking example on how the discharge of duties bonds a family, namely, the act of breastfeeding a child: "[A mother's] parental affection, indeed, scarcely deserves the name, when it does not lead her to suckle her chil-

216. *Id.* at 51.

217. *Id.* at 68. See also Jason S. Carroll et al., *Materialism and Marriage: Couple Profiles of Congruent and Incongruent Spouses*, 10 J. COUPLE & RELATIONSHIP THERAPY 287, 287–308 (2011).

218. VRW at 110.

219. *Id.* at 101.

220. *Id.* at 155.

dren, because the discharge of this duty is equally calculated to inspire maternal and filial affection.”²²¹ In this example the nursing mother engenders affection from the child and she also draws closer to her child. Fulfilling duties towards children has a strong effect on fusing the family throughout life as well: “If parents discharge their duty they have a strong hold and sacred claim on the gratitude of their children; but few parents are willing to receive the respectful affection of their offspring on such terms. They demand blind obedience, because they do not merit a reasonable service.”²²² Wollstonecraft further argues that by fulfilling this duty, rights accrue, that is, the family bond is strengthened—that children feel filial duty to their parents and then parents have a claim on the right to provide guidance to children beyond the years of their immaturity (Kantian *Unmündigkeit*) because they have fulfilled their duties as parents.

For Wollstonecraft, fulfilling duties is not a mechanical one-to-one correlation, but rather organic. The nursing mother and her child bond and this creates the future bond of filial loyalty. But there is more, when the sexes fulfill duties there is protection: “it is the indispensable duty of men and women to fulfil the duties which give birth to affections that are the surest preservatives against vice [in this case, adultery].”²²³ “True happiness . . .”, Wollstonecraft asserts, “must arise from well regulated affections; and an affection includes a duty.”²²⁴ And for Wollstonecraft: “Friendship is a serious affection; the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle, and cemented by time.”²²⁵ Wollstonecraft insists that “affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy” and when children are born a “mutual care produces a new mutual sympathy” and plenty of opportunities for the habitual exercise of such sympathies are presented as children are taught in family life and raised to maturity.²²⁶

V. CONCLUSION

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* has been situated in different intellectual contexts, but her place in politi-

221. *Id.* at 152.

222. *Id.* at 15253.

223. *Id.* at 152.

224. *Id.* at 142.

225. *Id.* at 73.

226. *Id.* at 152.

cal thought ought to be strengthened. Her writing engages a span of major eighteenth-century concerns including the role of reason in directing the passions and the development of virtue, natural law, ordered liberty, as well as how rights are related to duties. These are all inflected, however, in a specific context that is too often neglected. That context is the relationship between men and women in marriage and family life.

Carle Zimmerman has shown in *Family and Civilization* that marriage and family life are a primary concern of States in the history of the West.²²⁷ Scott Yenor's trenchant and useful book, *Family Politics: The Idea of Marriage in Modern Political Thought* (2012), argues that thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau, but also Hegel and others have grappled with marriage, children, and family life in connection to political thought, yet in precisely this context where Wollstonecraft has so much to contribute that has been neglected in her reception, she is mentioned only by way of an apology for her absence.²²⁸

Wollstonecraft's analysis is effective because her argument applies her philosophical insights in precisely these areas. Yet, for Wollstonecraft, these are not dry categories, but foundational to human happiness and flourishing.

This concluding example illustrates key aspects of Wollstonecraft's applied thinking:

Cold would be the heart of a husband, were he not rendered unnatural by early debauchery,²²⁹ who did not feel more delight at seeing his child suckled by its mother, than the most artful wanton tricks could ever raise; yet this natural way of cementing the matrimonial tie, and twisting esteem with fonder recollections, wealth leads women to spurn. To preserve their beauty, and wear the flowery crown of the day, which gives them a kind of right to reign for a short time over the sex, they neglect to stamp impressions on their husbands' hearts, that would be remembered with more tenderness when the snow on the head began to chill the bosom, than ever their virgin charms. The maternal solicitude of reasonable affectionate woman is very interesting, and the chastened dignity with which a mother returns the caresses that she and her child receive from a father who has been fulfilling the serious duties of his sta-

227. See CARLE ZIMMERMAN, *FAMILY AND CIVILIZATION* (James Kurth ed., ISI Books 2008) (1947).

228. SCOTT YENOR, *FAMILY POLITICS: THE IDEA OF MARRIAGE IN MODERN POLITICAL THOUGHT* 13 (Baylor Univ. Press 2011).

229. Here again is Wollstonecraft's view that gratifying sexual desires outside of marriage can lead to debauchery and result in one becoming less humane.

tion, is not only a respectable, but a beautiful sight . . . I have then viewed with pleasure a woman nursing her children, and discharging the duties of her station . . . I have seen her prepare herself and children, with only the luxury of cleanliness, to receive her husband, who returning weary home in the evening found smiling babes and a clean hearth. My heart has loitered in the midst of the group, and has even throbbed with sympathetic emotion, when the scraping of the well known foot has raised a pleasing tumult.²³⁰

Wollstonecraft demonstrates once again that she is concerned not merely with making the philosophical arguments that have been highlighted here, namely: that reason—to which males and females have equal access (and women should be granted equal access to developmental opportunities including educational and professional that have been denied them)—ought to direct the passions because a good life is ordered to duties (that are linked to rights), the exercise of which, through our moral agency develops virtue, to which men and women, held to the same standard of sexual ethics, namely, chastity, ought to aspire. Rather *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* throws into relief again and again the application of Wollstonecraft's thinking. In the aforementioned example, more akin to a vision of what marriage and family life should but also, importantly, might be for this is not meant to be a utopian vision, but an achievable one—Wollstonecraft's compelling example shows husband and wife to be equal in dignity and faithful to one another. Their equality and complementarity in marriage refines their exercise of reason and their individual quest to attain virtue. Explicit in her example is that both the woman and the man have bridled their passions—the man has avoided debauchery and dissolution, a sign that he turns from selfishness to accept the full responsibility of being a husband and father and finds fulfillment in these roles. The woman, too, turns away from self-conceit by eschewing vanity and pride (to preserve her beauty) and instead chooses to nurse her child—a key act for Wollstonecraft in that it signifies that a woman embraces fully her duties as a wife and mother. The couple's love for one another helps them to view each other as ends and not means, thus avoiding the dehumanizing tendencies of objectification and seeking only egotistical pleasure. Wollstonecraft states that both wife and husband accept their respective duties and both work diligently in their roles outside and inside

230. VRW at 142–43. Wollstonecraft does add something to her picture of domestic harmony, “a taste for literature, to throw a little variety and interest into social converse, and some superfluous money to give to the needy and to buy books.” *Id.* at 143.

the home—the husband returns home (a sign of his fidelity) and the wife awaits him (a sign of her devotion). Their caresses and the “pleasing tumult” of children seal the family unity. Wollstonecraft’s word, *cement*, carries an architectural connotation that suggests that family life is *built on* and *sealed through* fidelity, loyalty, hard work, love, complementarity, devotion, and acceptance of duties. One must choose to continue building on these foundations—and it is a choice—as Wollstonecraft beautifully writes to “stamp impressions . . . on hearts, that would be remembered with . . . tenderness.”

This mutual respect and complete fidelity forges a strong bond of loyalty and love that includes full bodily union, integral to marriage, for the couple in Wollstonecraft’s example have experienced both the unitive and procreative aspects of their exclusive sexual union: they have welcomed children into their lives.²³¹ Both are fulfilling their respective, complementary duties of motherhood and fatherhood in creating a harmonious household and family life and in so doing they deepen their matrimonial bond and also contribute to their community and civil society. And to this vision of domesticity, Wollstonecraft gives her full approval: “I declare . . . that I know not what is wanted to render this the happiest as well as the most respectable situation in the world.”²³²

231. Wollstonecraft here, it seems, is drawing on more than one family situation that she has observed.

232. VRW at 143. Wollstonecraft says again: “I have thought that a couple of this description, equally necessary and independent of each other, because each fulfilled the respective duties of their station, possessed all that life could give.” *Id.*